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The Neo-Mandaic Dialect of Khorramshahr. CHARLES G. HÄBERL. Semitica Viva 45. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009. Pp. xxxiv + 378. €78 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Na'ama Pat-El, *University of Texas at Austin*

Modern dialects of Aramaic have attracted serious linguistic attention only in the last decade, although their study has been conducted for over a century. Despite their obvious interest for both linguists and anthropologists, they have largely been neglected by Semiticists. The surging interest in the languages and their speakers came not a moment too soon, as these languages are fast disappearing along with their aging speakers. Wars, religious animosity, and mass immigration have depleted the villages and towns in Iraq and Iran that once were teeming with Aramaic-speaking Christians and Jews. Among these languages, Neo-Mandaic is doubly orphaned. It is spoken by an obscure religious minority, which, unlike Jewish and Christian speakers of various Neo-Aramaic dialects, has attracted little scholarly attention. The number of speakers was small even in the heyday of the language, but now that the volatile political situation has forced them out of their native lands, they are dispersed in a number of countries, congregated in small pockets that do not allow for the preservation of their ancient language. Charles Häberl has, therefore, done a great service to both linguists and scholars of the native people of the region by publishing his extensive study of one of the Mandaic dialects. But the book offers much more than simply a grammatical description of a dying language. In his detailed and well-referenced introduction he carefully, though briefly, outlines not only the modern history of the language and its sociolinguistic situation, but also the poor state of its study, almost as cautionary tale. It becomes clear that the modern language was not studied on its own, but rather always in the context of its classical form and as a footnote to it (pp. 23–29). Häberl seeks to address the modern language as a linguistic

unit in its own right. The result is fascinating and highly informative, with some peripheral lacunae hopefully to be filled in later publications.

The volume under review is currently the most well-informed and comprehensive study of Mandaic as a dialect group, not only of the particular dialect described in it. The information about subdialects in particular is invaluable (pp. 36–37). Häberl tracked down obscure and rare books describing the language and its speakers and has collated the information clearly. The introduction concludes with a Swadesh list, complete with IPA representation and transcription. In the following chapters, each word is transliterated and glossed. This may sound like an ordinary feature, but, in fact, it is quite uncommon in Semitic studies, where examples are typically presented in the original alphabet (and there are many alphabets for this language family), with only a translation, thus making most studies impenetrable to nonspecialists. As this language has been so poorly studied even by Semitists and Aramaicists, transcribing and glossing all the examples is a particularly helpful addition.

Classical Mandaic belongs to the Eastern branch of Late Aramaic, with Jewish Babylonian Aramaic and Syriac. The modern language, however, differs substantially from modern varieties of Late Aramaic, none of which is a direct descendant of either Syriac or Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. These descendants, known collectively as Northeastern Neo-Aramaic, are highly innovative. For example, they have essentially replaced their entire verbal system and innovated another, primarily based on verbal adjectives and infinitives. Mandaic, on the other hand, is much more conservative. It retained its suffix conjugation ("perfective" in Häberl's terminology), and even most of the thematic vowel classes, both of these being inherited from West Semitic. The derived stems (primarily D and C) are retained and remain semantically distinct. Compare that to Northeastern Neo-Aramaic dialects where the derived stems have been lexicalized, and their distribution is random, without any semantic significance. Particularly interesting is the retention of the reflexive forms, although they are on their way to extinction—the reflexives already seemed to be doomed in the classical language, and yet they somehow survived to the modern period with their function intact. Furthermore, important parts of the nominal morphology have been retained, such as grammatical gender (-*t* for feminine, -*Ø* for masculine), despite heavy contact with genderless Persian (contrast this with Ethiopic, which lost nominal gender due to contact with Cushitic).

There are more substantial differences between Neo-Mandaic and Northeastern Neo-Aramaic dialects. One of the central issues in studying modern dialects of Aramaic is language contact. Speakers of these languages are invariably bilingual, and in some areas, trilingual. The majority language, be it Arabic, Kurdish, or Persian, has left a significant imprint in every aspect of the grammar. Thus far, Mandaic has rarely been featured in studies of foreign influence on Neo-Aramaic, and this volume is not a substitute for a comprehensive study of the phenomenon in this language. Nevertheless, some information is provided. A list of borrowed lexemes is given in the introduction, but more data is to be found throughout the book, for example, in the discussion of nominal patterns (pp. 114–24), pronominal clitics and relative particles (pp. 158, 165), and quadriradical verbs (pp. 198–99, 211–12). The influence of Persian on this language has been quite extensive, to the point that Persian morphemes have in some cases replaced indigenous Aramaic morphemes (e.g., the plural morpheme -*ē* was replaced by Persian -*ān*-). In one Mandaic dialect, the Aramaic construct chain, where the head noun is morphologically marked (the so-called construct state), was replaced by the Persian *ezāfe* construction, where the dependent is marked. Häberl suggests that the reason for the intrusion of these Persian morphemes and constructions is the collapse of the nominal state system (pp. 258–59). This seems unfounded to me. The state system was already unstable in the classical period, where many of the functions it once marked were expressed syntactically rather than morphologically. The influence of Persian is relatively

late, as is seen from the fact that *ezāfe* is still not the norm in at least the Khorramshahr dialect. Despite the extensive contact with Persian, Mandaic speakers seem to be conscious of what is native and what is foreign. Most interestingly, loanwords are treated differently than native lexemes; for example, their plural morpheme is *-(h)ā* (cf. *-ānā* for native Mandaic nouns), regardless of their language of origin (pp. 130–31). As Häberl notes (p. 259), this is rather unusual, since generally in Semitic, and particularly in the modern languages, loanwords and roots are typically seamlessly assimilated into the system. There is much more to say about the sociolinguistics of this language, particularly given the status of the Mandeans in their home countries and the relatively small size of the community throughout the history of the language.

Normally, it is innovation which we seek to explain, but Mandaic is exceptionally conservative in a language group which is particularly innovative and which accepts foreign influence easily. This relative conservatism requires an explanation, which may very well be a sociolinguistic one. One hopes that Häberl will eventually attend to this aspect of the language.

Although Häberl made a point of studying Neo-Mandaic on its own terms, one problem I find with the book is its general avoidance of historical evaluation, with the exception of short comments here and there. This makes some of the features of the language puzzling to the nonexpert. For example, several morphemes have identical form but seemingly different functions. Thus, the referentiality marker, the possession marker, the directive preposition, and the object marker all have the same synchronic form, *(ə)l*. This homonymy could have been explained by a short paragraph describing the history of these morphemes. Although it is not uncommon in grammars to concentrate on the synchronic, in this case I find it confusing and artificial to avoid discussing the historical connection between these morphemes and others. This is especially pertinent in the case of the Khorramshar dialect of Mandaic, because of the relative conservatism of the dialect.

Overall, the book is a treasure trove of linguistic material. In addition to the grammatical description, it includes several short texts and a detailed lexicon. This is a very useful and informative volume on a language rarely studied and frequently overlooked. Häberl deserves our gratitude.

Language, Migration, and Identity: Neighborhood Talk in Indonesia. ZANE GOEBEL. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xviii + 221. $95.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Nancy J. Smith-Hefner, *Boston University*

Zane Goebel's book is a carefully crafted examination of how talk mediates social relations in the context of ethnic diversity. The study is set in two urban neighborhood wards in the industrial city of Semarang, which is situated on the north coast of Central Java, Indonesia, an archipelagic nation renowned for its ethnic and linguistic diversity. Though the two wards that are the focus of Goebel's work differ on a number of measures (their physical organization and layout, the socioeconomic status and gender composition of their inhabitants, and the stability of their populations), both are ethnically heterogeneous with a majority of Javanese residents, a significant presence of ethnic migrants from other regions of Indonesia, and a Chinese minority. Goebel's study focuses on patterns of interethnic relations as performed through language, identifying the various factors that contribute to or work against sustained contact among members in each of the two wards. The author painstakingly traces how newcomers and long-time residents in these two neighborhoods adjusted to one another over an extended period (1996–98)